

The Lone Star Reading List encourages reading for pleasure and is aimed at students in grades 6-8. Each year, 30 books - exploring a variety of topics, reading tastes, and maturity levels - are chosen by a committee of school and public librarians from across Texas.



2026 Lone Star List



The Singular Life of Aria Patel by Samira Ahmed

How this book stands out: Aria Patel tumbles through parallel universes, encountering alternate versions of her family and a boy who seems to follow her across realities. When she lands in a world she desperately wants to keep, she must decide whether the life she longs for is truly hers to claim.

You might also like: *A Forgery of Fate; You've Reached Sam; The Space Between Here and Now*



Spark by Chris Baron

How this book stands out: Finn's life in his quiet town is turned upside down when his community has to evacuate due to a wildfire close to home. As the community works to rebuild, Finn and his best friend, Rabbit, grapple with lingering fear and trauma while holding onto hope that they can help prevent future fires.

You might also like: *Ode to a Nobody; When Giants Burn; The Burning Season*



The Beat I Drum by Dusti Bowling

How this book stands out: Connor Bradley is dreading his first day at a new high school,

certain his Tourette-related tics will make him stand out for all the wrong reasons. But everything changes when he meets a girl who shares his condition and a music teacher who helps him channel his stress through drumming. Just as Connor starts to feel hopeful, his estranged father returns, and a school bully pushes him to his limit. With pressures mounting, Connor must confront his fears and uncover a surprising truth that may help him reclaim his confidence—and find his own steady beat.

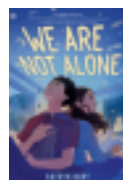
You might also like: *Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus; Please Pay Attention; Forget Me Not*



Westfallen by Ann and Ben Bracheres

How this book stands out: Six kids, three in the present day and three in 1944, find that they can communicate across time through a pair of radios. Too much information is shared, and the outcome of World War II is changed. Has Germany won, and the United States is now a country called Westfallen? Can the kids find a way to fix their mistakes and correct the course of history?

You might also like: *Glitch; Wolf by Wolf; Live in Infamy*



We are Not Alone by Katryn Bury

How this book stands out: Sam has dealt with more than any middle schooler should: losing his best friend, Oscar, to brain cancer, and recently overcoming cancer himself. As he returns to school, he is paired with the popular girl for a science project and discovers she is more of a nerd than she lets on. Together, they team up not only on their science project, but on a personal mission to find answers to Oscar's UFO-based mystery he left behind.

You might also like: *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pies; Rabbit, Rabbit; Aftermath*



Ollie in Between by Jess Callans

How this book stands out: Ollie finds themselves questioning their identity in the midst of a tumultuous seventh-grade year. Facing friend troubles and uncertainty over looming puberty, Ollie embarks on a journey of self-discovery that leads them to new friends and a new way of being. Ollie finds their voice in this tender and hilarious coming-of-age story.

You might also like: *Anna on the Edge; Glitch Girl; Murray out of Water*



A Hero's Guide to Summer Vacation by Pablo Cartaya

How this book stands out: Gonzalo is stuck spending the summer on a cross-country book tour with his famous but distant grandfather, author of the *Chronicles of Gonzalo Sanz*. Still grieving his dad, Gonzalo slowly uncovers his grandfather's past and the family stories no one talks about. With his mom joining near the end, the trip helps all three begin to reconnect and heal, leaving Gonzalo with a clearer sense of who he is and the story he wants to tell.

You might also like: *Busted; Not Nothing; El Niño*



The Legend of the Last Library by Frank L. Cole

How it stands out: A Blight of insects destroyed all the trees, and the government burned as many books and papers as they could to stop the Blight from growing. Now, Juniper (Juni) searches for paper to sell to buy medicine for her ailing grandfather. In her desperate journey, she catches the attention of Novexus, the leading company, and their robot dogs, and clues that might lead her to the secret Last Library. Can Juni avoid those chasing her and find the Last Library in time to

save her grandfather and learn the truth of what happened, not only to the nation but also to her parents?

You might also like: *The City of Ember; The Last Cuentista; The Book of Stolen Dreams*



Where Storms Only Grow by Alyssa Colman

How this book stands out:

Set during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl, this novel utilizes a dual perspective from twins Joanna and Howe to explore their tense sibling dynamic as they face devastating hardships on their family farm. Joanna's scoliosis leads to maternal overprotectiveness and frustration, while Howe works tirelessly, feeling invisible as he struggles to keep up with the farm work and his sister's unfinished chores. When their father leaves for California to find work after financial and environmental crises hit the family, the remaining family members demonstrate incredible resilience and fighting spirit to survive on the Great Plains.

You might also like: *Scattergood; Bea and the New Deal Horse; Will's Race for Home*



It's Watching by Lindsay Currie

How this book stands out: Josie and her friends, budding journalists, go to Chicago's historic Bachelor's Grove (the most haunted graveyard in Illinois) with the hope of finding proof of the Lady in White and the phantom farmhouse. On this Halloween Night, things turn truly creepy for the trio when they are texted a bloody message, "I'm Watching. You have 2 days." Can the trio discover the truth of the message before their time runs out and keep their friendship intact?

You might also like: *Dead Voices; 1-2-3-4, I Declare a Thumb War; The Clackity*



Shadowed by Carl Deuker

How this book stands out: Nate lives in his sister's shadow by playing soccer to impress his parents, even though he doesn't like it. But once Lucas moves in next door, he finds a new love for basketball. He and Lucas practice hard to become the best players and to take down the current star players. But everything changes fast when a prank goes too far.

You might also like: *Gym Candy; Rez Ball; Wrong Side of the Court*



The Factory by Catherine Egan

How this book stands out: When his family becomes mired in inescapable debt, Asher is sent to an experimental research facility in order to wipe it out. When teenagers start disappearing from the facility, Asher and his friends set out to find answers. Are the painful procedures they undergo really leading to clean energy breakthroughs? What is truly being taken from them each time they are forced to undergo the experimental procedures?

You might also like: *The Loop; Bite Risk; Moongaarden: Plotting the Stars*



The Strongest Heart by Saadi Faruqi

How this book stands out: With his mother out of the country for work, Thirteen-year-old Mo moves to Houston with his schizophrenic father. Mo's tough exterior hides a young teenager who misses his mother and who feels destabilized by his father's mental illness. With the help of his cousin Rayyan, his aunt, and the community of the local mosque, Mo learns to let go of his anger and chart a

path forward for himself and his family.

You might also like: *Quagmire Tiarello Couldn't be Better; Ghost; The Tenth Mistake of Hank Hooperman*



The Girl Who Kept the Castle by Ryan Graudin

How this book stands out: Faye Gardener, a maid and groundskeeper at Celurdur, is cursed to look partially like a cat by Wizard West when she tells him he died in his sleep. As a ghost, the wizard must host the tournament to find his replacement without letting them know he died. An evil shadow begins to lurk in the castle, down into its very foundations, to wrest control, harm all who live there, and disrupt the magical balance. Will Fay be able to keep the Wizard's secret while she tries to find a way to stop the evil shadow and protect the staff, the creatures, and the contestants before it's too late?

You might also like: *Howl's Moving Castle; Dealing with Dragons; Where There be Monsters*



The Freedom Seeker by Ruchira Gupta

How this book stands out: Simi's normal life in Northern India is flipped upside down when her community turns violent towards her parents' interfaith marriage. Her parents make the difficult decision to separate for their journey to seek asylum in the United States. Their plans go awry, leaving them all questioning the fate of each other. Simi uses everything within her to persevere through the harsh loneliness of traveling with a coyote from Mexico to the US so that she can reunite her family.

You might also like: *Finally Seen; Zarina Divided; Borders*



Blood in the Water by Tiffany D. Jackson

How this book stands out: Kaylani McKinnon, a 12-year-old girl from Brooklyn who is sent to spend the summer on Martha's Vineyard with the Watsons, a wealthy and "snooty" family of old friends. Kaylani is already under immense stress: her father is currently incarcerated for a crime she is certain he didn't commit, and she'd rather be studying law to help him than vacationing with the elite.

You might also like: *Body in the Woods; The Silent Sister; The Last Resort*



On Again, Awkward Again by Erin Entrada Kelly and Kwami Mbalia

How this book stands out: Two freshmen in high school, Pacy and Cecil, have to get past the awkwardness of their first clumsy meeting in the clinic in order to give love at first sight a chance. They will have to work through insecurities, bad advice, and their journey of self-discovery as they make room for romance.

You might also like: *Flipped; Not if You Break Up with Me First; When Dimple Met Rishi*



Gloam by Jack MacKay

How this book stands out: Since her mother's death, Gwen has pushed aside her grief to care for her younger siblings—especially after their move to their late grandmother's eerie old house on a misty island. But when Esme Laverne, a too-perfect babysitter with sharp smiles and darker intentions, enters their lives, Gwen is the only one who senses the danger. As nightmares take shape

and the house begins to decay around them, Gwen must confront both supernatural threats and the fears she's been avoiding. To save her family, she'll have to face the monster living under their roof—and the one growing inside herself.

You might also like: *Identikill; Another; The Secret Dead Club*



Vanya and the Wild Hunt by Sangu Mandanna

How this book stands out:

Eleven-year-old Vanya Vallen has never felt like she belongs—she's a British-Indian kid in a mostly white town, her parents won't share anything about their past, she has ADHD, and she can talk to books. When a monster attacks her family, Vanya discovers her parents' secrets and is whisked away to Auramere, a magical library-school for archivists and archwitches. Life there is thrilling, but danger isn't far behind. The mysterious Wild Hunt is on the move, and Vanya must use all her courage and creativity to uncover its leader and protect the first place she's ever truly belonged.

You might also like: *Skandar and the Unicorn Thief; Once There Was; Greenwild*



No Purchase Necessary by Maria Marianayagam

How this book stands out: Ajay is starting a new school as a 7th grader. In an effort to get in with Jacob and the popular crowd, he takes Jacob's dare of stealing a candy bar, only to be rejected by the boy he wanted to impress. Ajay is then stuck with a new dilemma: does he take the winning \$1 million prize from the candy bar he stole, which would help his family, or does he

confess to the store owner and face the consequences?

You might also like: *The Jake Show*; *Kareem Between*; *A Field Guide to Broken Promises*



Bye Forever, I Guess by Jodi Meadows

How this book stands out: When

Thirteen-year-old gamer Ingrid's real-life friendship dramatically implodes, a mysterious wrong-number text offers her guarded online self a chance at a new connection, and the opportunity to finally blend her identities.

You might also like: *Mallory in Full Color*; *Roll for Initiative*; *Dungeons and Drama*



The Trouble with Heroes by Kate Messner

How this book stands out: After Finn vandalizes a grave stone in a local cemetery, he avoids traditional punishments and is instead set the task of summiting the 46 peaks of the Adirondacks. Finn begins hiking grudgingly, but as he tackles each peak, he confronts his grief over his father's death and encounters the healing beauty of the natural world.

You might also like: *Joey the Good*; *Poetry of Car Mechanics*; *Just Keep Walking*



A Study in Secrets (Last Chance Academy) by Debbie Florence Michiko

How this book stands out: When 12-year-old Meg Mizumi is sent to Leland Chase Academy, she's still reeling from the grief of losing her mother and feeling distanced from her workaholic

father. She's not expecting to be pulled into a mysterious scavenger hunt with a big prize. But who is sending the clues and why?

You might also like: *The Liar's Society*; *Benny on the Case*; *The Misfits: A Royal Conundrum*



Keeping Pace by Laurie Morrison

How the book stands out: After losing the top scholar title to her ex-friend Jonah, Grace throws herself into training for a half-marathon to regain her confidence—and maybe beat him where it really counts. But as they grow closer, she realizes that winning might matter less than understanding who she is without constantly racing to the next goal.

You might also like: *Mallory in Full Color*; *Listen to This*; *Hidden Truths*



The Wrong Way Home by Kate O'Shaughnessy

How the book stands out: 12-year-old Fern and her mother escape living on The Ranch and move to a small town in California. Fern doesn't understand that she had been living in a cult, and desperately tries to find a way back to the life that made her feel safe.

You might also like: *Bloom*; *What Fell from the Sky*; *Outside*



The Extraordinary Orbit of Alex Ramirez by Jasminne Paulino

How it stands out: Alex Ramirez, a seventh grader in self-contained classes, dreams of space. Not only does he love watching rocket launches and reading

about planets, but he plans on working for NASA someday. Alex knows the first step to reaching his goal is to be placed in the mainstream science class. He will have to have the courage to believe in himself in order to succeed.

You might also like:

Freak the Mighty; Weird, Sad, and Silent; Not an Easy Win



Junius Leak and the Spiraling Vortex of Doom by Allan Wolf

How this book stands out: When Junius Leak's parents want some time to work on their marriage, they send him to live with a family he never knew he had - Uncle Spot and the cat, Aunt Bordeaux - in a boathouse located on Lake Pegineur. Though Junius is obsessed with learning about 'water bodies', his fear and anxiety keep him from getting in, and he must face that fear in his time with Uncle Spot. Can he face that fear when the lake turns into a whirlpool of destruction? And can he handle the family secrets and presumed cursed treasure he discovers while at the lake?

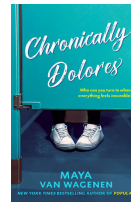
You might also like: *Holes; The Secret Library; The Vanishing of Lake Pegineur: A Graphic Novel Based on a True Story*



The Experiment by Rebecca Stead

How this book stands out: Sixth-grader Nathan knows he's an alien, but when other Kast kids vanish, and he starts changing, the experiment he's part of unravels fast. Called back to the mothership, he must rethink everything he believes about who he is and where he belongs.

You might also like: *Bloom; What Fell from the Sky; Defanged*



Chronically Dolores by Maya Van Wagenen

How this book stands out: Dolores, a fourteen-year-old living with interstitial cystitis, faces humiliation at school, a fading friendship, and tension at home. At a summer workshop, she meets Terpsichore, an autistic teen longing for more independence from her overprotective mother. Their unlikely friendship helps each girl push for the life she wants. Based on the author's personal experience, the novel offers an authentic look at chronic illness, identity, and resilience.

You might also like: *Popcorn; Louder than Hunger; Gut Reaction*



Kyra, Just for Today by Sara Zarr

How this book stands out: 7th-grade Kyra struggles with friendships and body image, while also worrying if her mom will relapse and return to drinking. Sensitive Kyra finds help through her weekly group meetings and her favorite hobby, cooking. Kyra is relatable as she deals with pressure and anxiety both at school and at home.

You might also like: *Maid for It; Coyote Queen; The Benefits of Being an Octopus*